
Three Human Graves of the Hassuna Culture in Türbe Höyük

Ergül Kodaş, Haluk Sağlamtimur and Yılmaz Selim Erdal



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Ergül KODAŞ, Haluk SAĞLAMTİMUR and Yılmaz Selim ERDAL*

THREE HUMAN GRAVES OF THE HASSUNA CULTURE IN TÜRBE HÖYÜK

ABSTRACT

In the Near Eastern Neolithic, the burials of the Hassuna period are still represented by a very small group of artifacts and burials. At this point the three stone cists unearthed in Türbe Höyük become more valuable though a deeper understanding of the skeletal remains. The settlement of Türbe Höyük is located on the left bank of the Botan River on the foothills of the Taurus Mountains within the Siirt province. There are 16 skeletons found in these graves, skeletons of women, men and children. This study includes the presentation of both archaeological and anthropological examinations of those skeletons.

Key words: Neolithic Burial, Hassuna Culture, Near East

INTRODUCTION

The study of practices related to the funerary world is one of the gateways to the major concerns of all societies in their relation to death, but also, by contrast, in their relation to the living¹. The argument often put forward by archaeologists and anthropologists is that funerary customs reflect the role and status of individuals or are linked to the social structure of the group². Funeral practices concern both the living and the deceased. For example, according to L. Binford and A.A. Saxe, funeral treatment is a reflection of a person's social position, relationship to death and mode of burial, referring to the social structure of the group and their hierarchy. Hodder suggests that the funeral customs are more or less complex³, which can be interpreted as part of a social structure (ritual in perspective and/or social transformation). From a social structure point of view, death is also a total break for the individual⁴. It is the irreversible departure of an individual who leaves his or her community. Hence, death is part of the social milieu, since it profoundly

affects the members of society. In this perspective, Van Gennep defends the idea that death must be defined as the opposite of life; on the one hand, it constitutes one of the transitions of life and, on the other the rituals of life, to face death and to restore the social order that has been disrupted⁵. From this point of view, funerary customs involve a transition in which they break the link between the deceased and the living⁶. Where prehistoric peoples are concerned, the data are limited, which further complicates the understanding of certain funerary gestures. Throughout prehistory, primary and secondary funeral practices in individual, collective and/or multiple burials, located in or around habitats, are frequently observed. There are several problems and ongoing discussions about these burial types. The distinction between places of burial and the creation of cemeteries throughout the Near Eastern Neolithic is part of this problem. The new discoveries here, however, allow us to problematize the funerary practice incorporating the recent knowledge of Near Eastern Neolithic from a societal and structuralist point of view.

*) E. Kodaş, Department of Prehistory, Artuklu University, Mardin, Turkey; H. Sağlamtimur, Department of Protohistory, Ege University, İzmir, Turkey; Y.S. Erdal, Department of Anthropology, Hacettepe University, Ankara, Turkey

1) Thomas 1980; Van Gennep 1960.

2) Binford 1971; Croucher 2012; Hodder 1980; Saxe 1970; Smith 1984; Thomas 1980; Van Gennep 1960.

3) Hodder 1980.

4) Thomas 1980; Van Gennep 1960.

5) Van Gennep 1960: 189; Smith 1984; Binford 1971.

6) Thevenet *et al.* 2014.



Fig. 1: Sites mentioned in this article.

SITUATION AND CHRONOLOGY OF TÜRBE HÖYÜK

Türbe Höyük is located 27 km south-west of Siirt, 6 km from the Botan River and Tigris crossing (Fig. 1). The Botan River begins south of Lake Van and it is fed by several affluences. It is one of the great sources of the Tigris, along with the Garzan and Batman rivers, in this mountainous region of the Eastern Taurus. The Botan crosses between the mountains and its banks are very deep and rocky. There isn't much agricultural land around this region. It is the main passage between the valleys of the Tigris towards Lake Van. The site was identified by G. Algaze during the surveys carried out between 1988 and 1990. It was revisited in the Ilısu Dam Project in 2000 by J. Velibeyoğlu and A. Schachner. Türbe Höyük is situated in the plain of the foothill of Şeyh Ömer Mountain, 1400 m above the sea level on a natural terrace on the left bank of Botan. The *höyük* measures 100 x 40 sq. m. of surface. The area is excavated by Haluk Sağlamtimur and Mardin Museum in a joint project within the scope of Ilısu Dam Project between 2002 and 2007. Occupation of the area begins with the Hassuna Culture (around 6400-6000 B.C.), followed by the Halaf Culture (about 6000-5300 B.C.). It contin-

ues with Ubaid and Uruk Cultures (Chalcolithic, about 5300-3200 B.C.), Early and Middle Bronze Age period (about 3000-2000 B.C.), and finally the Iron Age occupations.

HUMAN GRAVES AND THEIR DATING

This article focuses on three human graves (M1, M2, and M3, Fig. 2) dating from the Hassuna Culture, which designates a ceramic culture found in the Jazira and Upper Tigris valley during the second half of the 7th millennium B.C.⁷. The analyses of the C₁₄ are still outstanding, but from the typo-chronological point of view the funeral artefacts give us a preliminary idea about the dating of these burials. A vase with a rounded body with a closed neck was found in Grave 1 (Fig. 4, on the left). The dough is clean and chamois coloured. Grave 2 has a bowl and a pot with geometric patterns (open triangles and zig-zags) in black colours. The bowl is very rounded and its clay is clean and light-coloured chamois (Fig. 3). Its wall is fine. The pot also contains a thin orange-reddish clay (Fig. 4, on the right). Its body is very rounded and the neck is closed. The ceramics from these burials correspond to the ceramics of the Hassuna Culture, which is characterized by a painted ceramic, and made with rather fine clay. It is generally composed of rounded vases (height up

7) Aurenche and Kozłowski 2000; Tekin 2005; 2006.

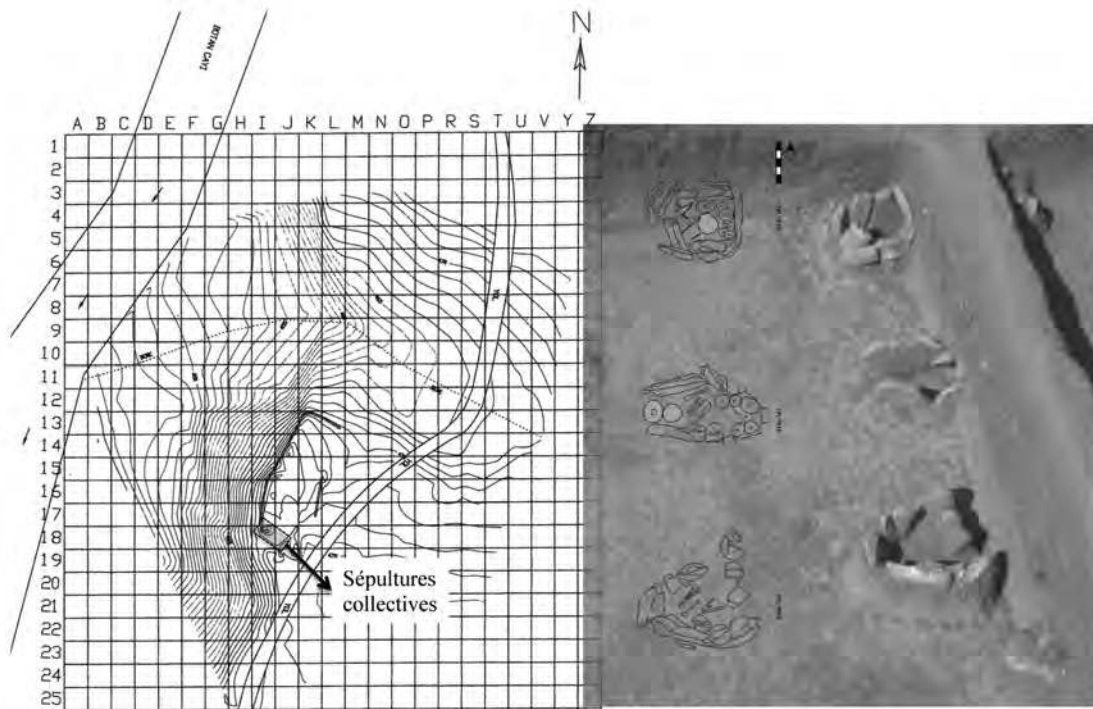


Fig. 2: Localisation of burials M1, M2 and M3 at Tübbe Höyük.

to 1.20 m), and rounded bowls⁸. When compared to similar sites; Tell Hassuna⁹, Hakemi Use¹⁰ and Yarim Tepe I¹¹, we find the same type of vases and bowls in terms of shape and pattern¹².

ARCHAEO-ANTHROPOLOGICAL ANALYSES OF HUMAN GRAVES

There are three cist graves in Tübbe Höyük which are located 1.50 m apart from each other (called M1, M2 and M3, Fig. 5), located in the southern part of the site, along a line from north to south. These burials were built with limestone slabs placed against the wall of a pit¹³. The foundation of the burials has never been flattened. They contain human remains, in total, belonging to 16 individuals (MNI), which are very poorly preserved (Table 1). It should be mentioned that red paint traces are identified on two skulls (TH'04 BHO/M2 and TH'04 BGB/M1). Body or cranial painting is evident from the Natufian culture and there remain traces of it throughout the Pre-Pottery and Pottery Neolithic¹⁴.

Dental caries and corrosion are found on the four adult individuals in the M1 burial (TH'04 BHO/M2 and TH'04 BGB/M1) and on the 6 adult individuals in the M2 burial (TH'04 BHM M2, TH'04 BRK M2 / 5, TH'04 BHL M2 / 6, TH'04 BRI M2 / 7a, TH'04 BRI M2 / 7b TH '04 BRJ M2 / 8). Examinations reveal two main problems can be dealt with from the paleo-anthropological point of view: the first relates to the mode of burial (secondary and/or primary) and the second is the contextual analysis of these burials, which are visibly outside the habitat.

Grave M1

The grave is about 95 cm wide and 95 cm long outside and about 50 x 65 cm inside (Fig. 5 and 6). Its state of conservation is good, except the west wall which is a little damaged. There are skulls belonging to seven individuals in the eastern part of the burial, as well as postcranial remains belonging to the adult subjects, dislocated and placed one on top of the other in the eastern and north-eastern

8) Lloyd and Safar 1945: Plate XIV /2; Robert 2010; Merpert and Munchaev 1987; Tekin 2007; 2011; Miyake 2010; Akkermans, and Schwartz 2003.

9) Lloyd and Safar 1945.

10) Tekin 2011.

11) Merpert and Munchaev 1987.

12) Merpert and Munchaev 1987: fig. 5,1-5, fig. 6/b ; 5-8; Robert 2010.

13) Sağlamtimur and Ozan 2007: 3; Sağlamtimur 2009: 132; 2012: 403.

14) Bocquentin 2003; Erdal 2013.

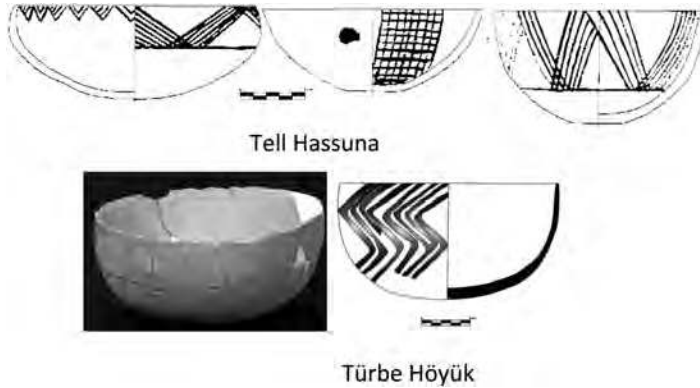


Fig. 3: The bowl from burials at Türbe Höyük and similar bowls at Tell Hassuna.

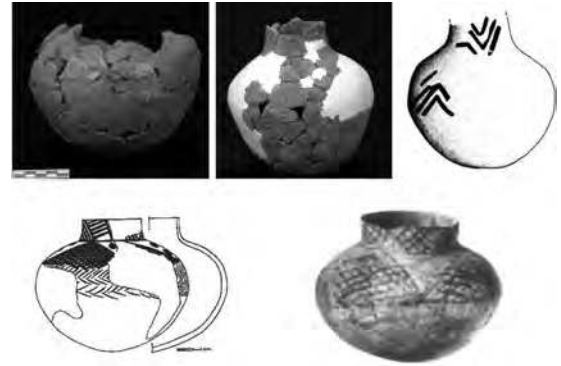


Fig. 4: Two pots from burials at Türbe Höyük and similar pots at Tell Hassuna.

Table 1.

Subject	Age	Gender
Burial M1		
TH'04 BGB M1/1	Adult 45-50 years old	Unknown
TH'04 BCG M1/2	Adult	Female
TH'04 BRN M1/3	Immature 2.5 years old	—
TH'04 BRH M1/4	Adult	Unknown
TH'04 BRL M1/5	Adult	Unknown
TH'04 BRO M1/6	Adult	Unknown
TH'04 BRM M1/7	Adult 30-40 years old	Unknown
Burial M2		
TH'04 BRF M2	Adult	Unknown
TH'04 BHM M2	Adult	Unknown
TH'04 BHO M2	Adult	Male
TH'04 BRK M2/5	Adult	Unknown
TH'04 BHL M2/6	Adult	Female
TH'04 BRI M2/7a	Young adult 20-30 years old	Male
TH'04 BRI M2/7b	Adult	Female
TH'04 BRJ M2/8	Adult	Male
Burial M3		
TH'04 BRG M3	Adult	Male
3 burials from 2 collective and 1 individual	4 male adults, 3 female adults, 8 indeterminate adults, and 1 immature	

part of the burial. Seven skulls are placed against the eastern wall and another skull is located along the north wall near the north-eastern corner. The sex of the two subjects was identified as a man and an adult woman. Four other individuals are also adults but their sexes are indeterminable. The last subject is a child of 2 to 3 years old (TH'04 BRN M1/3). Remains of the acephalic parts are found (some bone fragments: leg, arm, rib, vertebrae) of adult

subjects. They are displaced, highly damaged and they have no anatomical connection.

Grave M2

It measures about 65 cm wide and 130 cm long outside and about 50 x 100 cm inside (Fig. 5 and 7). Conservation status of the grave is good, but the west wall is missing. The M2 grave has eight adult individuals, including four males, two females and two undefined gender. One of the skeletons maintains anatomical connection although its condition has deteriorated. This is important because of its positioning and the condition of its joints. This individual was buried in a flexed position on the right side, leaving the left upper and lower limbs and skull still in anatomical connection (Fig. 8). Some bone fragments (leg, arm, rib, vertebrae) of other adult subjects, without anatomical connection, are also present (Fig. 8).

Grave M3

It is about 75 cm wide and 120 cm long outside and about 45 x 70 cm inside (Fig. 5). Its state of conservation is not good, and the east and north walls are especially highly damaged. This burial has yielded some long bones (upper and lower limb) belonging to an adult. It did not deliver any funeral furniture.

ANALYSIS OF INHUMATION AND FUNCTIONS OF THE GRAVES

The graves outside the habitat belonging to the Hassuna culture have been discovered only at Türbe Höyük. Two cist graves were uncovered at Hakemi Use, but there were no human remains in the graves. In addition, collective burials of this period located

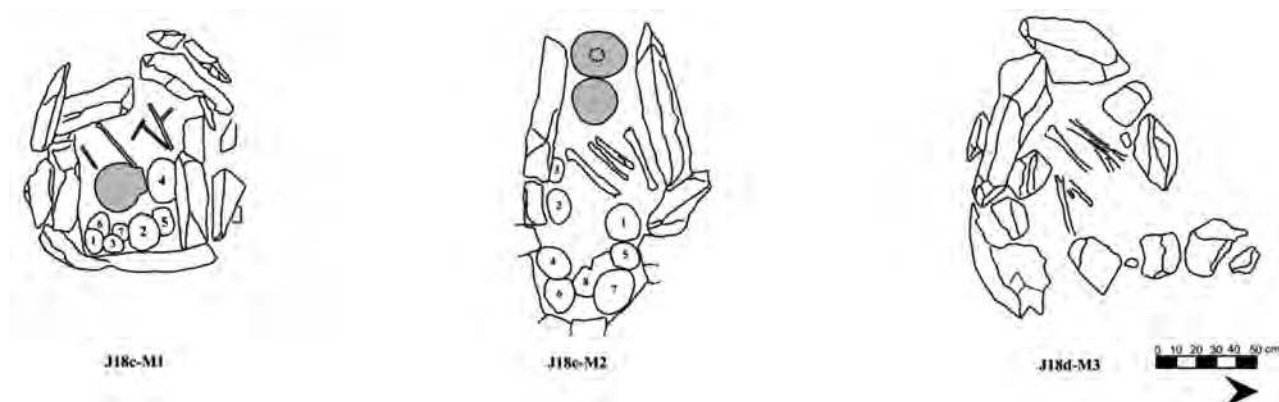


Fig. 5: Plan of burials M1, M2 and M3 at Tübbe Höyük.

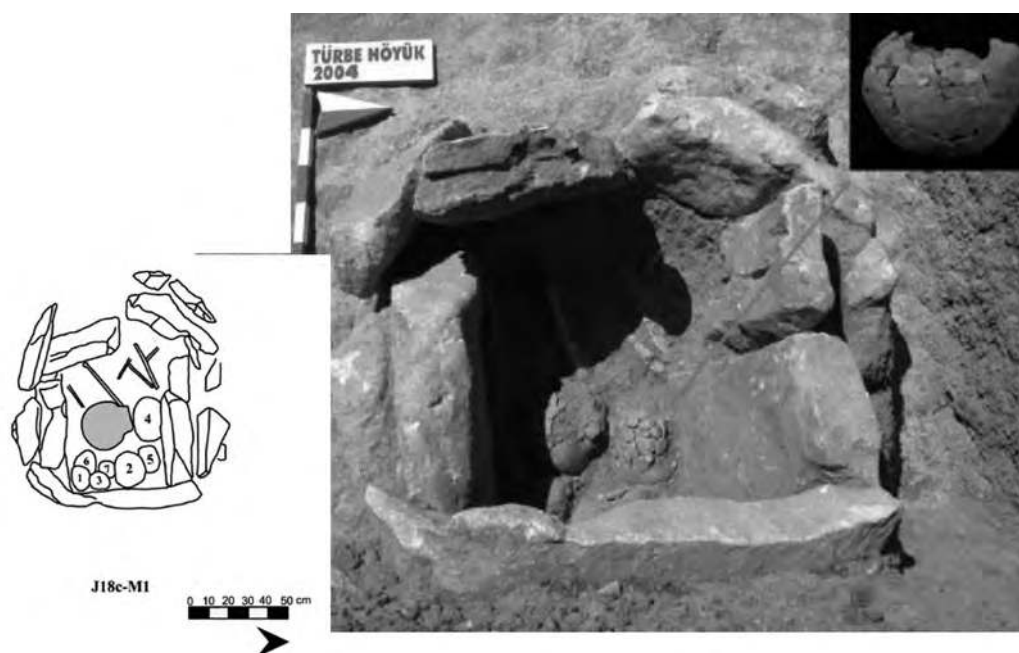


Fig. 6: Plan and photo of burial M1.

in the settlement are known at Yarim Tepe I¹⁵ and Tell Hassuna¹⁶. But they are simple graves. In Tübbe Höyük, burials are built with limestone slabs. Two of three tombs (M1 and M2) are collective, containing several buried individuals, the third (M3) had only one individual. It is possible that Grave M3 was also built for multiple usages but it was used only for a short time, which is why a single individual was identified. It is important to note that the size of the graves is very small for the number of the burials.

This characteristic relation to the number of individuals buried suggests a succession of deposits. Seven or eight individuals were buried in M1 and M2 in a space not exceeding 80-90 cm². This buri-

al process also explains (at least in part) the poor state of conservation of the subjects. While the skulls could be repositioned (moved/tidied) during later burials, they would be assembled in the eastern, sometimes south-eastern part of the grave. The presence of the partially conserved individual in the Grave M2, partly in the anatomical position, suggests that the decomposition was completed in the burial and that the burials were made as death occurred. It is believed that individuals buried at the lower level were dislocated and displaced during subsequent funerals; this form is typical funeral procedure of collective burials¹⁷. According to the small size of the burials and the state of preserva-

15) Merpert and Munchaev 1987.

16) Lloyd and Safar 1945.

17) Chambon 2000; 2014.



Fig. 7: Plan and photo of burial M2.



Fig. 8: Detail of subject in anatomical connection in the burial M2.

tion of the subjects, it appears that the long bones must be “drained” during later burials and that the skulls have been grouped together in the eastern, sometimes south-eastern part of the graves. These

results show that the bodies were present at the time of burial but only the skulls and some fragmentary bones that have been preserved. Some are anatomically coherent and even remain in connection with the skulls, suggesting primary deposits and the that skulls do not come from elsewhere, contrary to what one might believe at first sight. From the point of view of funerals, the common characteristics of secondary inhumations, which are very common in general, involve the transfer of the person to a final place of burial after partial or complete decomposition of the body and/or fleshy¹⁸. Often, it is the skulls that were taken and then individually grouped or buried elsewhere¹⁹. But in the case of Tübbe Höyük, it is clear that the skulls do not come from elsewhere, rather that the long bones are poorly preserved or removed during later burials. These burials are therefore collective, for the use of primary inhumation, and they may belong to a group or family (family crypt), for the long-term use.

BURIALS OUTSIDE THE HABITAT IN NEAR EAST

The burials of Tübbe Höyük are outside the settlement and they present characteristics of a cemetery area. But the most interesting point is that it was only adults who were buried in that area. From this perspective, the problem arises whether there is a contextual distinction based on the age of the indi-

18) Bocquentin 2003; Valentin *et al.* 2014; Thevenet *et al.* 2014.

19) Bocquentin 2003; Kodaş 2014; Valentin *et al.* 2014; Chambon 2000.

viduals. According to us (Y.S. Erdal) these distinctions, based on age, are related to the relations with the social structure of the Neolithic populations of the Near East. In Northern Mesopotamia, during the late 7th millennium the majority of sub-adult graves are found in settlements²⁰. For example, in Tell es-Sawwan a total of 77 individuals were identified, including 5 immature, 51 children, 17 young adults and 17 adults²¹. Sub-adults accounted for about 72.7 % of the burials. 95 individuals were found in Hakemi Use, 55 of which were sub adults–5 fetuses, 33 immatures and 17 children– and they accounted for 57.8 % of the burials. In Salat Cami Yanı, there are only 10 perinatal and 1 immature individuals, buried in the same house. The domination of children in the habitat is of little importance in Yarim Tepe I (4 children and 2 young adults on 6 subjects)²², in Tel Sotto (6 sub-adults on 9 subjects)²³ and Tell Hazna II (only one immature)²⁴.

Unlike the majority burials of sub-adults in the settlements, graves areas outside the habitat are rare in the Near Eastern Neolithic, except for a few sites that allow us to compare intermural and extramural graves. For example, a cemetery-like zone was found at Tell Ain el-Kerkh, where 240 individual were identified²⁵. Primary and secondary burial in single, multiple or collective burials were all present. Of the 59 subjects studied there was included 33 adult men who correspond to 55.9 % of the individuals. In opposition to the cemetery area, evidence from the settlement of the same *tell* shows the burial of children is predominant, with a number of 22 compared to one adult²⁶. A similar situation was also found at Tell Sabi Abyad where approximately 45 individuals, mostly adults, were found in the cemetery area, Operation III²⁷. A total of 32 individuals were identified in the settlement, mainly in Operation I²⁸, including 24 children and 8 young adults. The children correspond to 75 % of the subjects in the habitat while they are absent in the cemetery.

During the Halaf Culture and the contemporary cultures in the Near East, the same funerary distinction was found according to the age of the individuals on those sites that have a cemetery. For example, in the cemetery area at Tell Arpachiyah²⁹, 3 children and 7 adults were uncovered. In Tepe Gawra, a total of 27 subjects were identified, including 26 adults and 1 child in the cemetery³⁰. Similar data have been reported for Aktopraklık Höyük (in Western Anatolia)³¹, where a cemetery dating from the 6th millennium and intramural burials have been identified. In Aktopraklık 44 subjects were studied, finding 37 adults and 7 children and new-borns in the cemetery area³². Alpaslan-Roodenberg also mentions, without giving the precise number, that sub-adults are predominantly buried in the habitat³³ and adults are almost absent. According to these preliminary analyses, she proposes that adults were buried mainly in the cemetery and children in the habitat³⁴. In Tepecik/Çiftlik, two different buildings were found, within the settlement area. For example, the BB Building is used as a burial site, with a majority of adult burials. On the contrary, children are mostly buried in and around houses in Tepecik/Çiftlik. Therefore there is a clear distinction between adult burial sites (in BB Building) and sub-adults in the same settlement³⁵.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

According to anthropological analyses, in a large geographic area including Central and Western Anatolia during the Pottery Neolithic children and, in some cases, women are more likely to be buried in settlement areas³⁶. The strong presence of the burial of adults outside the settlement area is seen in several Mesopotamian and Anatolian sites. This data also complements this change during the Pottery Neolithic period, in the area including TÜRBE HÖYÜK. Indeed, it seems that the process of funerary gestures ex-

20) Akkermans and Schwartz 2003; Erdal 2013; Tsuneki 2011; Özbek 2011.

21) Breniquet 1991; Youkana 1997; El-Wailly and Es-Soof 1965.

22) Merpert and Munchaev 1993.

23) Barder 1989.

24) Barder 1989.

25) Tsuneki 2011.

26) Tsuneki 2013.

27) Liesbeth and Akkermans 2009.

28) Liesbeth and Akkermans 2009.

29) Mallowan and Rose 1935.

30) Tobler 1950.

31) Alpaslan-Roodenberg 2011; Karul and Avcı 2013.

32) Alpaslan-Roodenberg 2011; Karul and Avcı 2013.

33) Alpaslan-Roodenberg 2011.

34) Alpaslan-Roodenberg 2011.

35) Büyükkarakaya and Erdal 2012; Bıçakçı *et al.* 2012.

36) Akkermans and Schwartz 2003; Tsuneki 2011; Erdal 2013; Alpaslan-Roodenberg 2011.

pressed with regard to death diverge according to the age of the individuals from the 7th millennium in the Near East. This is a new funerary treatment that manifests itself in the form of the creation of a place of burial, outside the habitat, for the use of adults more specifically whereas the burial of sub-adults remains predominantly in the habitat. This is a funerary distinction, probably related to the social structure of the society of the recent Neolithic of the Near East.

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